

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**THE WORKING PEOPLE OF LOWELL
LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
MARY BLEWETT/MARTHA MAYO**

**INFORMANT: LEONA PRAY
INTERVIEWER: JULIETTE BISTANY
DATE: OCTOBER 25, 1985**

**J = JULIETTE
L = LEONA
B = MR. BACON**

Tape 85.19

J: ... conducted on October the 25th. The narrator is Mrs. Leona Pray. The interviewer is Juliette Bistany. And we're at Mrs. Pray's home at the Westminster Village Arms. Mrs. Pray where were you born?

L: In Lawrence, Mass.

J: Do you mind telling us what year?

L: 1906.

J: And where in Lawrence were you born?

L: May Street.

J: May Street. I understand you're French Canadian?

L: Yes.

J: Was that a French neighborhood?

L: No. Not there either. There was all kinds of people, Italians, Irish, French and there was two German families.

J: Umhm.

L: But outside of that they were French. Course there's was variety, you know.

J: Sure. Um, where did your parents come from?

L: My father was born in Nashua.

J: And your mother?

L: My mother, in Lowell.

J: What made them come to Lawrence? How did they meet and come to Lawrence?

L: I don't know. Their mothers knew each other. His mother came from Manchester to Lawrence to work. She had cousins. And of course my grandmother was already in Lawrence, my mother's mother. So they met in the mill.

J: Oh they met in the mills?

L: And for awhile they were working in Lowell.

J: How did that happen? They lived in Lawrence but worked in Lowell?

L: Yup!

J: What mill?

L: The Merrimack. My mother's mother was a weaver and my father's mother was a spinner.

J: Umhm. That's interesting.

L: Yah?

J: And then they came back and worked in Lawrence as well?

L: Yes.

J: And when you were born, (repeats) when you were born, where were they working?

L: Ah, my mother wasn't working. After she got married my father made her stay home. My father was a carpenter.

J: Oh he was a carpenter?

L: And he never worked the same place. When the job was done, they go on another job, you know?

J: That's right. How many children in the family?

L: Seven.

J: Oh God bless them.

L: Four lived, you know, a full life, and three died when they were children.

J: What do you remember from your childhood?

L: It was beautiful! I'd go and live it all over again. I would! We had Grandma and Grandpa with us. Well Grandpa worked third shift. And we'd play outside while he was asleep. And he slept upstairs. We had a cottage like, up and down.

J: Oh, describe the house.

L: There was seven rooms. You'd walk in on the side of the house, there was a long long porch, which it's still there but it's been enclosed.

J: Umhm. You go back and visit the old neighborhood, do you?

L: Oh yah!

J: When we go get water, we ride by.

J: Oh the water on Main Street?

L: Yah. I go with them sometimes, you know, and we stop there, we look. And my Grandmother had a big garden. You'd go downstairs, and at the end of the property there was a big stone wall. And the Boston-Maine... Maine Line... Boston to Portland, Maine (J: Umhm) was up there. And in the wintertime my Dad worked on the railroad and in the summer he was a carpenter. And at night after they had gathered all the freights around Boston, they'd be riding by towards Portland, Maine. And my father was a great one. He'd be on top of the car and he'd swing his lantern. And my Uncle George's brother was what you call a conductor of the freight. He had charge like a truck driver. You know, where everything is going? And he'd swing his lantern too. That was the tail end of the...

J: The train?

L: The train, you know?

J: Umhm.

L: And ah, my mother, my Grandmother had a part of the garden for us. We used to plant little radishes and scallions, you know? Little things like that. And of course we'd eat what we planted. Grandmother used to grow corn, potatoes, cucumbers, tomatoes. She had the biggest plants you

know, you can imagine. She had things tied up around them so they wouldn't fall over. It was great! We had apple trees, pear trees.

J: It was like living in the country, but it was wild.

L: It was, yah!

J: Hm.

L: A full backyard downstairs. You'd go down a set of stairs.

J: Let me ask you. What did you usually have for a Sunday meal when you were all home?

L: My mother always made a big roast. Sometimes it would be beef, other times it would be pork, yu know.

J: You say you came from a middle class family?

L: Yah.

J: That you never wanted for anything?

L: No. No.

J: What school did you go to?

L: Sacred Heart in South Lawrence. We moved from May Street on October of 1911. I was about five and a half. And we moved to Farley Street in South Lawrence.

J: Umhm.

L: Farley begins at Broadway (J: Umhm) and it goes all the way to, well it crosses Clifton I think, up to Clifton Street. As far as, maybe more, because it's been all built up. In those days it was all woods. And near Mt. Vernon, after Brookfield, there was a big ledge, all stone. And we use to go and gather blueberries with my grandmother. We'd spend a whole day in the summer. We'd bring a lunch and a bottle of water, or two bottles, whatever. And we'd stay there and fill our pails. Course that was in South Lawrence. All we had to do was come down the hill, (J: That's right) Brookfield Street (J: To go home) and do you know what we use to do on Brookfield? Do you know where Lenox Street is?

J: Yes I do.

L: From Lenox, it wasn't built up much. There were no cars there or anything. We'd slide on our sleds all the way from Lenox and Brookfield, all the way to Farley and Eastern Street, the next street over. It was great!

J: Those winters were great! Not too much traffic in those days?

L: No. And my mother made our stockings, our mittens, our hats, scarfs, sweaters, she knitted them.

J: Cause she stayed home, but your father was doing the work.

L: Yah.

J: What high school did you go to?

L: I didn't go to high school.

J: What happened? Tell me?

L: I went (--) I graduated from Sacred Heart in 1920, in June. In September of that fall, I mean that year, I started going to MacIntosh. They use to call it Lawrence Commercial College. I took up shorthand, typewriting, business English, rapid calculation and filing.

J: Oh my god ! That's great!

L: And rapid calculation (--)

[Tape is turned off, then on again]

J: Mr. Pray you wanted to say something about (He corrects her and says "Mr. Bacon") Mr. Bacon, excuse me. You wanted to say something about um, your mother not being allowed to go to Washington after graduating from the Commercial College?

B: Yes, as I wanted to say, my mother was seventeen when she graduated from MacIntosh and (L: And my sister nineteen) her sister was nineteen. She graduated from MacIntosh Commercial College there in Lawrence in 1923 was it? (L: Yup) And ah, she and her older sister who was nineteen at the time, each had offers from Washington to be Federal Secretaries in Washington, D.C. Of course they had already had some work experience, both of the sisters. And in those days things were a little bit different. Everyone in the family contributed to the general welfare of, the overall general welfare of the family. Unlike a lot of situations that we have today. And children in those days were much (--) The whole situation, society was much more conservative than it is now. Our society today is far more liberal than it was sixty years ago. And a seventeen year old person in those days was still considered a kid. And the way I understand it frankly, my mother's father in particular thought that she was too young to be leaving home and going hundreds of miles away to pursue a career of her own, and in fact wouldn't let her go. So instead she wound up entering a dying industry in her youth.

L: It was already in a dying industry.

J: Oh, you mean the Textile Mill.

B: Yah. (L: I was already in) It was already dying. She was a youth. She was a young youth throughout. She had a chance to go to Washington, D.C. to pursue a career as a Federal Secretary (J: umhm) and she instead entered a dying industry. And she was (unclear).

J: What mill did you go into?

L: Well I started working in the mill at first when I graduated from grammar school. I went to work at the Tire Rubber, in Andover. I worked there for about a year, and then I quit. Then all of a sudden this girl lived next door. She said, "They're hiring where I am, why don't you girls come?"

J: Did you need the money?

L: Well, you know, you can always use more.

J: Okay.

L: But we were not on Welfare or anything, you know. I don't think they had Welfare in those days. [Both laugh] Well anyways, we were doing all right, you know, with what we had. But you know in those days people wanted to go to work. And you know, I sure would like to go back now, (J: sure) but they wouldn't hire me.

J: Well I think you like to dress well. So it meant being able to buy your own clothes.

L: Yes, buy your own clothes.

J: And how about socially? You met people through work too, didn't you?

L: Oh yes!

J: So what mill did you (--)

L: The [Eswacco.]

J: Oh the [Eswacco].

L: You don't know about that?

J: I don't know. I don't remember that.

L: Now you go up So. Broadway (B: United States Woolen Company) from Water Street.

J: United States Woolen Company?

B: Or Corporation. (J: Uh huh)

L: United States Worsted. After you cross the bridge (J: Uh huh) on So. Broadway, (J: Yes) on your left between the canal and the river, (J: Near the falls?) the falls are on that side (J: Oh the falls) when you're going to So. Lawrence.

J: Oh yah, that's right.

L: But on that side, I think there's a filling station, (J: umhm) and something else there now. There was a big seven floor mill. They called it the Eswacco.

J: So your girlfriend figured you'd like to work there because she worked there?

L: Yah, and we'd walk home together.

J: Sure. Tell me all about it.

L: Well, and our boss was a man. He lived on South Broadway. We'll say right here, and there's Farley Street here, and our yard was right in back of his yard.

J: Oh, so you knew him?

L: And yah.

J: Umhm. Was he a French Canadian too?

L: No.

J: What was he?

L: Um, I can't think of his name. [Pauses]

J: Okay, maybe it will come to you later.

L: He was English.

J: He was English, okay.

L: Yah, he came from England with his wife. They were married when they came to this country.

J: Was he super? A superintendent?

L: Yes.

J: He was the superintendent?

L: And he talked like the English did.

J: Was he nice though? Was he nice to the girls?

L: Oh yes!

J: Uh huh.

L: Oh yes. I'll tell you I never minded working in the mill. Some people complain about it, but to me it was a job. I liked the people I worked with. You know? I liked my job. I learned to do drawing-in.

J: Drawing-in. Now I don't know anything about the mill. You tell me.

L: I'll explain to you.

J: Okay.

L: Our work, when it's completed, goes in the loom. Did you ever see a loom?

J: Um, I've seen it demonstrated, but I've never been in the mill.

L: Why don't you go to our, what do they call that place? In the mills there.

J: Aha. The Heritage Park Exhibit, or the Museum?

L: Yah on Market Street. (J: Aha) There's a loom there.

J: Okay.

L: That's a little old, old loom. Our looms were bigger.

J: Aha.

L: And they were a little different.

J: Aha. Were you working on cotton or wool?

L: This was wool.

J: It was wool.

L: Well worsted.

J: Oh yah that's right. Who taught you? Who put you on that loom?

L: Well it was some girl I was sitting with. (Unclear) we had patterns. Ah, let me see if I can explain it to you.

J: Okay.

L: They have a stand. And they have these long, they look like a frame. And they got a steel shaft here, flat, and a steel shaft up there. And they have these wires with a hole in the middle, like an eye. They call these heddles, (spells HEDDLES). And you have these patterns. We say these things I'm telling you about, like a frames, those are, they call them harnesses. And you have a twelve harness, let's say. One, two, three, to twelve. And on these there's a lot of heddles. As many heddles as you're gonna need. You take them one by one, put them on the right shaft, you know, each harness. Well we had patterns. Some of them we had plaids and we had herring bone. We had all kinds of stuff. Patterns.

J: This is a hard job I take it?

L: Well to some people it is, but it was like second nature.

[Tape is turned off then on again]

J: I'm putting this on because I think this is important. What's this about in Billerica?

L: The Talbot Mills. The building is there, but it's gone.

J: What did women do that usually women don't do?

L: They did beaming.

J: Aha.

L: Course that had chains like a chain fall. And the man would come, some man would come and put the beam in place and the girls would do the job of beaming.

B: Beaming used to, in many peoples minds anyways, use to require a man to do it., because the work was a little on the heavy side, (J: Heavy side) and that type of thing. And women usually were not employed to do that type of job. It was a man's job, okay. That's (--) There were other jobs like that, I'm pretty sure too, in the mills in those days, that women just didn't do because of, probably because of their lack of strength, lack of size, and so on and so forth. (J: Umhm) But women were excluded from some jobs in those days. [Unclear].

L: Well they were too heavy.

J: But that's the only time, when they were too heavy. Other than that you did a lot of other things ...

L: Well you know when we had samples (J: aha) to do, they weren't heavy at all, till they (--). I use to set up my own work.

J: Well how heavy were these (L: Well) for you to lift? You're a tiny women.

L: I know it, but I'll do it. Anyways.

J: You'll do anything in other words? You're strong enough to do it.

L: They had this little truck (J: aha) under the beam. And they had these frames. And this one on that end was stationary. You'd raise the thing and put the end of the beam, like a little pin, in that one and come over here and raise this one and put it in this other end. There's nothing to it.

B: How much does a beam weigh? How much does (--)

L: I don't know! Probably forty, fifty pounds.

B: And you weighed about eighty five I suppose?

L: Yah, maybe less then.

J: How old were you? Seventeen?

L: Oh no, by then I was older.

J: This is your first job now. Let's go back to your first job.

L: Well I was talking about the (--) (J: Yah) I've been drawing-in (J: umhm) through my life.

J: That was the first you learned, and then off and on you would be a drawing-in.

L: Mostly on. (J: Mostly on) But when there was no work, wherever I worked, and I got laid off, I'm in Lowell now, you know, I'm no longer in the Eswacco. I'm in Lowell. Whenever I needed work and there was nothing I could get on woolen, I'd go and see the nurse at the Boott Mill. She use to do the hiring. She talked to you (--).

J: Nurse? A nurse did the hiring at the (--)

B: (Unclear, all talking at once)

L: Yes! Um ... Miss Mitchell.

J: Miss Mitchell.

L: Doris Mitchell. She lived on Christian Hill.

J: And if you needed a job you saw Miss Mitchell?

L: I use to go see Miss Mitchell. She'd always hire me. And she'd say to me, "Leona when your mill calls you, call me up or let me know one way or another, and go. If you need work, come back. You are in the versatile class." (J: Oh) She use to say.

J: Yup. You do a number of different jobs well.

L: Yes.

J: Were you fast with your hands?

L: Oh yes.

J: What did it need? Coordination between the eye and the hand or, why were you so good and maybe somebody else wasn't so good?

L: I don't know. They must have been all right, if they stayed working. They must have been pleased with them.

B: She was so good for one word (J: Umhm) dedication.

L: You know?

J: Dedication.

B: One of the hardest working people I've ever known in my whole life.

L: I'm a workaholic.

J: Yah, you gave them their money's worth. How much did they pay you at first? What did you (--) Let's go back to Lawrence.

L: I don't remember.

J: You don't remember what you got paid? How many hours a week did you work at first?

L: Ah, forty.

J: Oh just the forty.

L: Oh yah!

J: This was like 1925?

B: No.

J: No?

L: Ya, 24, 25, 23.

B: Yah.

L: 22!

B: She was fourteen when she was working forty hours. And they were hiring kids twelve and making them work forty hours in those days, if I'm not mistaken.

L: I don't think so. You had to (--) You wouldn't know. There was a place on Common Street. They called it the um (--) What's that school in Lowell? Like a vocational school. Use to be downtown on the corner of John.

B: Yah, Lowell Trade.

L: Lowell Trade.

J: Umhm.

L: It's like a trade school. And if you weren't sixteen, you had to go one morning a week. Even if you had graduated from grammar school you had to go there. And I learned millinery. I can't think of her name either.

J: This is in Lawrence though?

L: This was in Lawrence, yes.

J: This is why (--) When you moved to Lowell is it because you married someone from Lowell?

L: No, we moved to Lowell because there was nothing in Lawrence.

J: What year was that?

L: Ah... 1930?

B: ['29 or '35]

L: 1930?

J: That must have been just when the depression started?

B: Yah.

L: It was right after. '29 was (--)

J: You were still living at home with your family?

L: Oh yes! I didn't get married till I was twenty-seven. That's why I tell you I'd go back and live my childhood all over again. You'd come home and you'd smell the fresh bread. Ma was making bread. You know, you'd smell it. We lived one street away from school. The school was on Groton. We use to go through this alley. There were no houses there, you know, where the alley was. (J: Um) No fences. And we'd go right back to Groton Street and go right to the school. And we'd come back the same way. And we'd smell cookies. We'd smell bread. It was always my mother baking.

J: Oh and I guess all the other neighbors baked too?

L: Yah!

J: That was a predominantly French Canadian neighborhood around Sacred Heart?

L: Yes.

J: Yah, that (--)

L: Well you know when I went, (J: aha) the sisters came from France.

J: Oh they did? Then you (--)

L: Yes.

J: Did you learn French and English?

L: I learned French and English.

J: Oh, very good. And you stayed at the Sacred Heart School until the eighth grade?

L: I graduated June 28th, 1920. And then that summer, around August, I got that job at the Tire Rubber. We use to take the trolley, the street car (J: um) to go up.

J: Tell me, how did you socialize in those days when you were still that young?

L: Well we had this girlfriend who lived on Haverhill Street, near Railroad Street. She died in '77, Ida? There was her and her sister, (J: umhm) and her mother, and a stepfather. And we'd walk back and forth to each others house. There was another girl on Railroad Street. She died too, Loretta St. Cyr.

J: Did you go to the movies?

L: Oh yes! Yah! All of them. Ah, the Victoria, the Modern, the Palace, the Broadway, the Premiere, the Empire.

J: So you know them all? [Laughs]

L: Oh I remember.

J: Too bad this isn't the tape for the city of Lawrence. [Laughs] That's great!

L: Well if you want to tape the Lawrence I'll tape for you.

J: I better move you to Lowell now. So depression hit in Lawrence and did the mills close down or what happened at this [period]?

L: Well the Eswacco did. (J: Oh yes) That's where we worked. And I had an uncle, my father's brother, lived in Lowell. And his oldest daughter of course, you know, cousins, she use to keep in touch with us. And ah, I went first to live in my uncle's house.

J: Oh!

L: And I got a job in the Lawrence Manufacturing, you know in Lowell.

J: In Lowell, sure.

L: I was doing spinning.

J: Oh, did they ask you to do spinning? Did you ask to do it?

L: That's the only job was open was spinning, and I got it. And we worked eight hours a day, and five hours Saturday morning, overtime.

J: Oh then did you have a union?

L: Nobody ever talked union to me.

J: That was around what, 1930 though?

L: Ah, '30, '31.

J: Okay. And you don't remember how much you got paid there either huh? No?

L: You know the thing was I gave my mother my envelope unopened. So I (--)

J: And she gave you an allowance?

L: Oh yes, she supplied.

J: How much? [Laughs]

L: Oh I don't know. She used to buy all our (--) I know one thing, my father bought a gramophone, a nice one. It stood, you know, with a cabinet, with slots to put in your records.

J: Um, I remember that.

L: Paul Whiteman was the big noise in those days. Paul Whiteman and his Orchestra. We had all his records. So we must have had a good allowance to go and buy records.

J: Um hm.

B: Excuse me. There was really no allowances. What it amounted to was the kids brought their pay home unopened, okay, gave it to Mom, and Mom gave to the kids as she felt fit. [Unclear], a much more conservative way of life in those days, and much more liberal now as opposed to then. This was a normal thing in those days for the kids working at fourteen, fifteen years old, bringing the whole pay home to the parents. The parents using a good part of the pay for household expenses with a few treats for the kids who were earning a full-time pay. That's the way it went in those days.

J: And then if you needed something they would (--)

B: Of course, they'd provide for your needs.

L: Yah my mother used to buy our clothes. We'd go with her of course.

B: But it wasn't a situation of like my mother would bring home five dollars a week and she'd get a dollar for herself, or something like that.

L: Oh we brought more than five dollars.

B: But she'd turn in all the pay and Mom and Dad dispensed as they felt that (--)

L: Pa had nothing to do. Pa would do like us, give Ma his money. And they discuss, they'd discuss what they were going to pay this week. Well so and so needs shoes. We'll buy the shoes this week. Next week it'll be so and so that's going to get something, you know. We all had our turn.

J: And this happened right during the depression, and you really didn't feel (L: No) too bad.

L: No. We never had to want for anything to eat.

J: How many of the kids were working around that time?

L: Ah, just me and my sister. The oldest one before my sister died when he was about a year old.

J: Umhm.

L: And of course my sister was born, and then my mother had a miscarriage.

B: Then you were born.

L: Then I was born. And then she had another miscarriage. Then my brother. Then my sister. Then another brother.

J: Were you all born in a hospital or at home?

L: At home.

J: Oh. Did you have a doctor though?

L: Oh yes!

J: He came to the house?

L: Oh yes!

J: You don't remember who delivered you, do you?

L: Pardon?

J: Do you remember who delivered you? Did they ever (--)

L: No.

J: No? I was wondering if they ever talked about it? You know, some of the old doctors?

L: They had a Doctor Birmingham.

J: Umhm.

L: He was on Salem Street in So. Lawrence. Well he's gone now.

J: And they had the Lawrence General Hospital too, but you kids were all born at home.

L: At home, yah.

J: I see, he would come right to the house?

L: Yup.

J: Uh huh. Any of your neighbors have midwives? Or did they all have doctors?

L: You know I was five and a half (J: yes) when I left you know, May Street. (J: May Street)
When my mother was having babies, she had one baby on Farley Street.

J: Aha.

L: And we all went to my uncle's house.

J: Do you know why I ask? Because sometimes mothers will tell their daughters that as they're growing up. My mother... Like my mother told me all the hard times she had. She had one with a midwife. She fell down, she couldn't deliver normally. And she told me all these stories and now, I know them all. But I guess your mother didn't talk too much.

B: I didn't know that there was a doctor when you were born. I was born at home and there was no, was there a doctor there?

L: Of course, Dr. Case, and a nurse.

B: Yah there was a nurse. I thought it might have been a midwife.

L: Miss (--)

J: You were born at home?

B: I was born at home as well.

J: I'll be asking that later on. Ok, so now, where (--)

L: I'm in Lowell.

J: You're in Lowell now. And you had moved here because of depression and there was no work. How come there was work in Lowell and there wasn't in Lawrence?

L: I don't know. The Lawrence Manufacturing was about the only place that was working steady. And then I got a chance (--) In 1933 there was an ad in the paper. They wanted drawing-in girls, at the Uxbridge Worsted. You know where that mill is, the Silk Mill, where they have all of those, Historical Park.

J: Oh yah! The Museum and (unclear)

L: Well in the back of the yard the mill is still there. They call it the Uxbridge Worsted. They had two and a half floors. I went in there as a drawing-in girl. Off and on we'd have a lay-off. I'd go and see Miss Mitchell and then she'd give me work. Other times I'd go to the U.S. Bunting

on Newhall Street. The buildings are still there. It was called the Wamesit Power. You know, the whole, what you callit, Heize Electric was on the other side on Lawrence Street. I never worked there, but it's a big complex of different companies. I worked there off and on probably about seven years. I walked in there one morning and the boss was sitting at his desk. His back was turned. I see William J. Entwistle. And I turn around and I come in, you know. "Good morning Mr. Entwistle! How are you? I'm looking for a job. I can do a lot of different things." "Sit down," he said. Now nobody ever did that! Nobody would dare go in there! I knew that but I was going to sell myself, you know? And I did. He hired me. He didn't need any drawing-in girls, but he needed somebody to make up those harnesses they call it. Put the wires on them. Count them. So many on each, you know, for a certain pattern. I did that job too. So I fitted right in. And when there was an opening on drawing-in, I was there. He put me on drawing-in. I also did battery hands in the weave room. You know, the shuttle goes back and forth. Inside the shuttle there's a bobbin, about this long, full of yarn or cotton, whatever. And when it's empty, these here, from the battery, they jump right into the shuttle. It's automatic. So I'd fill up the batteries. Wasn't hard. Got to be on your toes. You had so many batteries to fill. You couldn't let them empty. Cause if they went empty your loom would stop. There was money lost for the company and the man that was running the loom.

J: You were very dedicated.

L: Huh?

J: You were a very dedicated worker.

L: I am. I'm dedicated period.

J: Yes, because (--)

L: He'll tell you that. If I tell you I'm going to call you in the morning, or I'm going to be on the corner to meet you, I'll be there.

J: You see they were lucky to find a worker like you. Did you find that the other woman (--) How about the woman that came here from overseas, and you had to work with them, like the Italians and the Portuguese?

L: They were all right, because I tell you why. I tried to understand people, you know? Like I hear these Greek woman on the bus. I know what they're talking about. I listen and I hear. Most of the time I can tell you what they're saying.

J: But they're speaking Greek. How can? I don't understand.

L: It's like I have a sister-in-law.

B: First of all she was married to a Greek.

L: Half Greek.

B: Bacon, her first husband okay, was half Greek. Secondly, if you know one romance language and she's fluent in French, (J: umhm) you can pretty well figure out close to every European language that is spoken. You know, the Romance languages are pretty similar. They're rooted together. And French is of course one of the Romance languages and my mother is extremely fluent in French. As fluent in French as in English probably. As I said, between being married to a half Greek man whose father was born in Thessalonika in Greece, (unclear, L begins to speak at same time)

L: And he graduated from the University of Athens.

B: Graduated from the University of Athens, (L: Yah) that type of thing.

Tape I, side A ends
Tape I, side B begins

L: In fact I got laid off for quite awhile. And I went to do housework and minding kids for this lady on Ward Street. Now that's all gone. That University of Lowell, that big high-rise.

J: Oh yes, Fox Hall.

L: There was all little streets there, you know.

J: Oh, right downtown Lowell, yah.

L: Yah.

J: Yup.

L: And um, I went to her house. In those days there was no beer sold or nothing. There were no barrooms. And she use to make beer.

B: Prohibition probably.

L: Huh?

B: Probably during Prohibition.

J: Probably.

L: Yah.

J: Prohibition.

L: Yah.

J: Yah, good.

L: So anyways um, she use to make beer. And she'd have a party every Saturday night. She'd empty out the big big room, and we use to dance square dances.

J: Oh!

L: And you'd buy the beer. So anyways I met him there. He was with her cousin who later on his sister married a brother-in-law of mine. Oh it's a long story. Anyways, that's where I met him.

J: Were there all different nationalities that came there for a party or (--)

L: A lot of them were French. I believe the majority was French. But nobody knew he was a Greek. They all knew him as French, because his mother was French.

J: Oh his mother.

L: My father-in-law had nine children, and none of them wanted to learn the language. I was the outsider. The in-law that was so interested. I wanted to learn. And my poor father-in-law died 1947. He was only what, 67 years old, about that. And when he died all the Greek stopped.

J: Oh, well he was speaking Greek in the house and you were his daughter-in law (--)

L: To me, I lived with him (J: oh) for two years.

J: Well see, you met your husband at this party, okay. Did he ask to take you out? Or how did it happen?

L: He took me home.

J: Oh, he took you home. How did you get back and forth? Did he have a car?

L: No, this was in our neighborhood.

J: Oh, so he walked you home.

L: We lived on Perkins Street, which is no longer there, I don't think. And they lived on Ward Street. He lived across the river. You know Aiken Street bridge?

J: Umhm.

L: Well, you crossed Lakeview Avenue and his house was on the corner of Ennell and Lakeview Avenue. And this was a Saturday night. He was at my house the next night. [Laughs] The first thing I knew, we went out together for two years and we got married.

J: Where did you use to date in those days? It wasn't the same as now, I mean.

L: Oh we'd go to a movie.

J: You had no cars, you know, [unclear].

L: No. We'd go to a movie, and sometimes I'd go to his house. I was welcomed, you know.

J: Now is mother was French?

L: Yes.

J: Did she cook Greek? Did she learn how (--)

L: He did all the cooking, my father-in-law.

J: Oh.

L: He cooked Greek. Yah.

J: Oh, when you married your husband did you pick it up? Did you want to learn how to cook?

L: Ah, he didn't (--) After we got married, don't bother.

J: Umhm.

L: You know. Now we'll make a roast and we'll make this. Nothing Greek. Not even the soup.

J: Oh.

L: (Says something in Greek)

J: Oh yah!

L: Yah!

J: Ah, the egg lemon soup. (L: Yah!) Isn't she something.

L: Anyways, he didn't want any. Forget it. When we want Greek we'll go eat at my father's.
So. (J: Yah) And we would. We'd pitch in you know?

J: Now his father, your father-in-law, was born in Greece?

L: Yes.

J: How did he meet a French women and marry her?

L: He came to this country with his father. (J: Umhm) And they were going around selling bibles. You know (--)

B: Will wonders ever cease huh? (J: Laughs)

L: You know where Smith Baker is? There was a big Congregational Church. (J: Umhm) He and his father were members of that church.

J: Oh he wasn't Greek Orthodox then?

L: No.

J: He was Greek Protestant.

B: Excuse me, Congregationalist is usually Protestant.

J: That's interesting, yah. I don't think there were too many Greeks that were. They're usually Orthodox. All right.

L: I don't know.

B: [Unclear]

L: But they had a Greek church!

B: [Unclear] My mother's father-in-law, my grandfather, as she said, came from Greece. He came from Thessalonika, okay, which is one of the leading cities in Greece. In fact. (L: It's in Macedonia) it's in Macedonia. It's where Alexander's Empire was (J: umhm) as a matter of fact, the headquarters of that. And I think you probably should know that the old man, like I said, went to the University of Athens, sold bibles and you probably, I don't know if you want to tape this or not but, his sons (--) First of all his name was Aristides, okay. The name originally was Baccous (he spells BACCOUS). Okay. And they, when coming to this country, immigrants and everything, they wanted to Americanize it. And they decided on Bacon. But his first name was Aristides. My father's name for instance is Ulysses, okay. He had other sons named Homer, Socrates, Euclid.

J: That could mean an educated man.

L: [says a name in Greek, sounds like Exclesis]

B: Etc., etc. He had all of the (L: He had) old, old Greek names for his children.

J: Okay, I would like to tape that. Tell me about your husband's family.

L: Well he had , there were six boys and three girls.

J: All born in America?

L: Oh yah.

J: Um.

L: Yah. They were married at St. Louis' Church, the old church.

J: Oh then he married in the Catholic faith because (--)

L: No he did not!

J: What's St. Louis?

L: He got married (--)

B: St. Louis is Catholic, but (--)

L: He got married in the rectory.

J: Oh, all right. Okay.

L: He got married in the rectory where the priests lived.

J: Okay, because he married a French woman who was Catholic, but he was Protestant. (L: right) So in those days they, they had (--)

L: That's right, now they don't do that.

J: Yah, you can get married [unclear].

L: Everybody's equal, you know?

J: Right.

L: And a year after they were married, they were married August the 15th, and their first child was born the following May.

J: What was your husband's first name again?

L: Ulysses.

J: Oh, your husband was Ulysses?

L: There was [Achilles], Homidas, [Odeseas], Socrates, [Exclisis] and Aristides. Aristides.

J: All classical Greek names.

L: And the girls.

J: Yes.

L: Helene.

J: Helene of Troy.

L: And Helene and Rose.

J: And Rose?

L: [Trian de Fillet). I don't know why it meant, something about thirty kisses, or thirty friends.

J: Uh huh. Huh.

L: You people cook almost like the Greeks, don't you?

J: Yah, a lot of their stuff. We eat grape leaves.

L: And cabbage leaves.

J: And cabbage leaves.

L: Yah.

J: Yup.

L: (Says Greek word).

J: Oh is that what they call it?

L: What do you call it?

J: Um, the cabbage is [foreign word – sound like malfoof].

L: [Foof?].

J: [Malfoof] (laughs)

L: [Malfoof]

J: Ya, it's a funny name. And um, grape leaves are (--) I don't even know. [Laughs] I forget.

L: Shame on you.

J: I know. [Laughs] I know in Greek they call them [Doma] don't they? [Doma (unclear)].
Yah. I come over to the Greek restaurants in Lowell sometimes [unclear].

L: And they have these meatballs too.

J: Oh yes.

L: Kefta.

J: Kefta, we call it Kefta.

L: Yah?

J: We do, yah! And we put the spices in it. (L: Yah) So that makes it [unclear].

L: And he rolls it in flour and he fries it.

J: Aha, that's the way we do it. Yah!

L: In good deep fat, you know.

J: Yah, and our sweets are the Baklava. We make the Baklava. We make the Baklava.

B: Oh yah?

L: Oh yah, Baklava.

J: Yah, we make that too.

L: Yah, and (--)

B: Have you ever been to any of the ethnic fairs in Lowell that we have?

J: No, I've missed them.

B: Oh my gosh they've got food (J: aha) that won't quit!

J: I know there's a Greek Festival every year.

B: Every other year.

J: Oh is it every other year?

B: It was last year, wasn't it Scott, last summer?

S: [Unclear].

L: Oh, I think it was this summer.

B: Yah, that's what I mean. This past summer. So it won't be next summer, it will be the summer following. A couple of years ago man they had a wooden Trojan horse down there and everything.

J: Oh my god!

B: Yah. (J: Wow) And like I say, they got ethnic foods not only at the Greek Fair. They have other ethnic fairs where they have all kinds of ethnic foods out here in Lowell, during (--).

L: The grape leaves is called (Greek name).

J: Oh (Greek name), it's like us.

L: (Greek name).

J: It's the same. Yah, [Greek name]. I just remembered. (Greek name) that's what we call it too. It's just a different pronunciation.

L: There's something else they used to make too. And I use to be so hungry for that when I carried him. We had a car by then, me and my husband, and we'd go to this place in Nashua and I would get (Greek name).

J: That I don't know.

L: Um (pauses), it's the organs of a lamb.

J: Oh!

L: Chopped up and cooked up.

J: Yah.

L: (Greek name)

J: Yah. We don't call it that, but we do the same thing. I don't eat it.

L: I use to eat (--) Oh I loved it.

J: You're kidding? It's the lungs and the heart.

L: Yah, this was mine. Don't nobody come here.

J: Is that right? Then you became more Greek than the Greeks?

L: Of course!

J: Did they love you? I bet they loved you.

L: The old man did. The kids never, you know, it was all right. I used to play ball with them. One of my brothers-in-law just passed away. He was buried the day of the hurricane, Gloria. (J: oh) Yah, Socrates.

J: Oh (L: yah) Socrates. Oh, I'm so sorry.

B: Yah, he was the one that, yup.

J: Oh. So you were just as close to them. Was your husband close to your family?

L: No. I was closer to his people.

J: Was your family put out that you were going to marry a Greek man?

L: Oh no! No. My mother, and my grandmother was living. They all loved him.

J: Of course he had a French mother.

L: I know. (J: laughs) But even so.

J: Maybe they believed you?

B: That helped I'm sure.

J: I'm sure that helped.

B: Yah, I'm sure.

J: Now that was unusual for your father-in-law to have met a French woman here. What year did they get married? Did they ever tell you?

L: Um, (pauses) 1904.

J: 1904.

L: Yah, my oldest brother-in-law is 1905.

J: Oh wow! Now I have a note here that tells me that you saw the first Haley's Comet.

L: I sure did!

J: How old were you?

L: I must have been about four. And we still lived on May Street. And we went up. My grandfather was living. We went up a hill in the cemetery.

J: Oh yah.

L: To see it better, you know?

J: Oh, did the newspapers tell you what night to go out?

L: It did, I imagine. They knew when and where to go. I followed.

B: So she's going to see it for the second time (L: Yup) in another few months. Ask her what she thinks of the difference between the first one, and oh no she hasn't seen the second one yet.

J: No. I should come back.

B: I thought of a great joke, but you may not want to tape this, I don't know.

J: Yah, go ahead. Go ahead.

B: My mother has such a positive attitude. I told her that after she's seen Haley's for the second time, if someone comes up to her and interviews her and says, "What do you think of the difference between the first one and the second one, from a child's viewpoint to an elderly woman's viewpoint", you know. (J: umhm) What would be a real good reply was, would be something like ah, "I think I'll reserve my opinion until the third one".

J: Oh yah, that's good, yah.

B: Isn't that something?

J: Oh, God Bless you. I mean how many people can say that they've seen, you know.

B: That's it. Two Haley's Comets. How many people can say that?

J: Ah, yah. That's incredible.

L: I'll be eighty next March you know.

J: Oh God Bless you. Um, tell me. Let's get back into the 1930's. Did you work after you married your husband?

L: Oh yes. I worked all my life.

J: Okay. That means you worked when the war started too, the Second World War?

L: Yes, and for awhile there, during the war, there wasn't too too much doing at the Uxbridge Worsteds.

J: Umhm.

L: And I went to work for General Electric.

J: Oh.

L: Ah, you know where WLLH is?

J: Yes.

L: On Dutton Street. Well there was that whole empty mill at the time. Well there was a store in the bottom, the Giant Store. We use to go and eat down there. I believe it was the fourth floor, General Electric was making suits for the fliers. These suits were heated. They had all little wires sewed in them, and a lining and a cover over the lining like a shell. And ah, I was an inspector. Now it's hard to see a little thin wire that's been sewed up. Your needle was not suppose to hit that wire at all. And I was on inspection. And then after awhile, they needed someone on final inspection. I use to put on the jackets, you know, and try them out for heat. And then the war ended and they closed down.

J: That was just for the war. So now that meant you had to go around and look for another job. Did you ever feel like staying home? Especially where the rest of them are all (--)

L: No, I don't think so. Even now, (J: umhm) I could stay home. (J: umhm) I go out everyday.

J: But you know, you didn't actually work for the money, did you?

L: For what?

J: You didn't actually work for money?

B: Oh, yah, yah. She did.

J: Did you?

L: Well yah. (B: oh yes.)

J: Oh I got the impression that she really liked to go out of the house and work.

L: Well you know, you didn't know this.

B: No, she, she did it out of necessity. That's (--)

L: After my boy was born, (J: aha) he wasn't quite seven months old, we got left.

J: What do you mean?

B: My father walked out.

L: He took off.

J: I'm sorry to hear that.

L: Oh, that's all right.

J: But I'm surprised!

B: So, she worked out of necessity. We were alone together all those years.

J: What year was that? Do you know?

B: 42?

L: March the 12th, 13th, 13th 1942.

J: Ah, let me ask you, was he a mill worker, your husband?

L: No, he did all kinds of jobs, you know?

J: Yah, how many children? Just one?

L: Yah.

J: Oh.

L: At the time (J: thank God) that he took off (--)

B: You want to know something else? I'm sorry again for interrupting, but you left G.E. in what, 45 was it?

L: Yes.

B: In 1964, after I got out of U.S. Air Force of Strategic Air Command, I went to work for General Electric in Lowell.

J: Not doing the same thing I'll bet. [Laughs]

B: Not doing the same thing, but I worked for the same company.

J: Oh, such a coincidence.

L: He was making synthetic rubber.

B: Yah. You know how they have the wire? The insulation on the wire?

J: Yes.

B: The copper on the inside.

J: Sure.

B: And then they insulate the outside with rubber.

J: Oh yah.

B: Well I use to manufacture synthetic rubber for the insulation on the wires.

J: Aha.

B: Big, big machine type of thing, you know?

J: Aha.

B: I was like a line-leader more or less.

J: This is when you came back from the service?

B: Yah. I got out of (unclear) in the Air Force in 1964 and I had a, I took, I had thirty days leave coming just before I got out of the Air Force. And what I did was I took the thirty days, I was stationed in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Pease Air Force Base. And I took those thirty days, came back to Lowell and started scronging around for a job. So I had myself set up with General Electric before I got discharged.

J: Did you live with your mother all that time?

B: Before I went in the Air Force, yah, just me and her together.

J: From forty-two on then.

B: From, yah, from forty-two on.

J: So, did you have to support yourself and your little son? Or did your husband send you money?

L: No, he didn't give us anything.

J: He didn't give you anything. So I see what you mean when you say she did have to work for money.

B: Necessity, believe me.

L: But we did well. I bought a car. I had a license to drive. I still have it.

J: Oh, what year did you get your first (--)

L: Ah, when I was eighteen.

J: That's way back!

B: 1924.

J: You must have been one of the first women (--)

B: Drivers in the state.

L: No, there were others.

J: Really? Oh I think that's wonderful!

L: And Model T, Model A.

B: You're talking about sixty-one years in a row she's had her license.

J: She's sharp.

L: Standard shift.

J: She's sharp.

B: Oh yah.

J: Imagine that?

B: Thirty ton trailer trucks. (L: Yes) Eleven speed, thirty ton trailer trucks.

J: When she weighed eighty-five pounds?

B: That she would drive from Lowell to New York.

J: How did that happen? What kind of a job was that?

L: Well, my future (--)

B: That wasn't a job, but she did it! [Unclear]

L: My future husband. (J: Okay) Yours truly up there, Mr. Pray, he made the Constitution too.

J: Oh you married a second time?

B: Yes, yes.

J: Of course.

L: Yah, his name is Bacon.

J: And you're Mrs. Pray?

L: Yah.

J: Okay, let's see. Where can we take this? First of all, when you drove the truck you weren't married to Mr. Pray yet?

L: No, we were just friends.

J: Okay, tell me all about the whole thing.

L: Well his wife had died, and his two children were living with his mother. And he wanted me to marry him. Well I wasn't, divorced. Of course I could have got a divorce right then and there, because we got left. He was already had a couple of kids with this women he was living with.

J: Oh, you knew? Oh!

L: Oh yah, we knew where he was. And after awhile this guy here took off. He didn't want to get married. He took off and went to live in California. But in the meantime, he worked for L&L in Lowell. That's gone for years.

B: Construction Company.

L: And then, because I didn't want to marry him, he and this women got together. And he brought his two kids ... Well his father bought a house for them in Dracut. What's the name of that? Black Knot Road?

B: Broadway Road.

L: Route 1.

B: Broadway Road.

L: Yah, Broadway Road, 390 Broadway Road. First thing I know, he and this women are breaking up. He takes off. The house went back to the bank and I didn't see him for years! I brought up his two kids along with my son.

J: He left his two children with you and took off?

L: Oh yah. Men do that.

J: Oh!

L: You know, women do it too.

J: Did he give you money for his children's up-bringing?

L: No, his mother (--)

B: Not even a letter. Course she wasn't really, actually they weren't living with her.

L: No, they were living in Methuen.

J: Okay.

L: And I used (--) You know where Stratmore Road is?

J: No.

B: Off of Haverhill Street in Methuen.

L: In [unclear]?

J: Are you going to tell me the St. Anne's Home? Were they there?

B: No. (J: Oh)

L: Ah, no, no. The mother and father, his mother and father had a home. (J: Oh) I believe it was 25 Stratmore Road.

B: Yah, 25 Stratmore Road.

J: Oh

L: And they had the children.

J: And they had (--) All right.

B: But you're getting away from driving the truck, which I know Juliette wants to hear. (B&J laugh)

J: We have a lot of tape. Don't worry.

L: Yah. So I went with him a few trips, you know, to New York. I'd take my turn behind the wheel.

J: And you had a shift, huh? (L: Yah)

B: Eleven years!

J: Eleven years!

B: Eighteen wheeler, thirty ton, eleven years!

L: You know what else too? I had gone to school with this fellow by the name of Fairweather. They lived at 57, I think, no 54 Mt. Vernon Street. I believe the house is still there. And he lived in Dracut. And I met him downtown one day after twenty-seven years. I looked at him and I said, he got fat by then. I said, "Are you Bill Fairweather?" He said, "Yah, who are you?" So I told him, I explained. Oh my God, you must meet my wife. You must meet my kids, they're in the Five and Ten. They came out, I got introduced. We started being friendly. A lot of times Bill would make three trips to New York. On the third trip he'd need somebody to go with him. She wouldn't go. (J: aha) She was afraid on the highway. So I'd go and I'd take my turn behind the wheel. And this Pray that I married, I met him, his wife was carrying their second baby. He worked for L & L too. And he, Bill told me that was Don Pray. I started thinking, I said, "Is your father's name Arthur?" He said, "Yah." My father use to work with him in Lawrence, when we lived there. Carpenters.

J: Hm.

L: I'm telling you I meet more people that I knew before, my folks knew. You know?

J: Oh.

B: But you're talking 3 a.m. on the truck route. Eighty pounds.

J: That's right.

B: Eleven years, thirty tons, eighteen wheeler. (laughs)

L: My first time (--)

B: At 3 o'clock in the morning. There you go!

J: 3:00 am. Three in the morning.

B: There you go.

L: My first time driving the truck, Bill came home in the morning. He had to go out that night. And they had a well. And the well went on the frits. They lived in the country.

J: I see.

L: He worked all day. His wife says to me. She says, "Lee, will you go with Bill? You probably could keep him awake." And she said, "I'll mind Ronny," you know? We use to call him Ronny. His name was Ronald, but now we call him Ron. So anyways, I went with him. And he says to me, "You'll have to take your turn right away Lee, I'm so tired." So he fell asleep. I get behind the wheel. (J: Oh) He showed me, you know. (J: Yes, yes) By the sound, you can tell. You're going up the hill. You feel your motor slowing down. So you shift in the lower gear! You gun your motor and shift the lower gear.

B: Double clutching that's called.

L: Yah, oh yah!

J: That's fantastic

L: So anyways, I went through New Haven. I didn't see this sign, truck route, going around the city.

J: Yah right, they don't allow them in.

L: On to route 1. (J: Yah) I come right into (--) [Both laugh] I string around this little circle you know, and I hear a whistle. The window was opened. It was in July. It was warm.

J: Right, it was a cop.

L: I stopped the truck. [Makes noise] the air brakes, you know. I look out the window. He was down there. He said, "You know you're not supposed to come in the city."

J: [Laughs] How old were you just about then? You must have been what, in your thirties?

L: Ah that was 1944, 45?

B: Mid- thirties.

J: Oh the war was still on?

L: Oh yah!

J: The war was still on!

L: Yah! When the war ended, (J: yes) he had an old Ford. His wife wanted me to start out and go and meet him on the road. Hey, it's kind a hard. All trucks look alike at night. (J: laughs)
You know?

J: She never got up and went anyplace, did she?

L: Oh, she (--) I used to drive her all over with the old Ford. I didn't have a car in those days.

J: Well what year did you marry Mr. Pray?

L: In 1970.

J: Oh, you took a long time making up your mind.

L: Well, you know, he went to California.

J: Aha.

L: And for years (--)

B: He disappeared. He disappeared for twenty or more years!

L: I didn't hear from him.

J: Then you worked in the mills. You brought up your son, and you use to visit his two kids. Is that how it happened?

L: Yup!

J: Oh, I understand. Okay.

L: So anyways, I said, "Well where do I go now?" He says, "Go the way you were going, to route 5." (J: He gave you a ticket?) But he said, "The next time you come through here.." No, no, no ticket.

B: Ma, why don't you tell Julie how you got started driving, and how long you were driving before you actually got a license? Why don't you tell her that?

J: Yes, tell me how you learned how to drive.

L: Oh, I drove about three, four years.

J: No license huh?

L: Yup!

J: They weren't strict in those days, the registry?

L: Nobody ever stopped me.

J: Nobody ever stopped you? [Laughs]

L: So I was lucky.

B: She'd take the keys while my father was asleep.

J: Your father had a car right?

B: No, my father, her husband.

J: Oh.

B: While her husband was asleep, (J: oh) she'd crank up the old lizzy and teach herself how to drive.

J: Then you didn't get your license until after you were married the first time?

L: That's right.

J: I see, but you drove.

L: I had a license earlier, when I was eighteen. And I didn't renew it one year. And the next year I didn't renew it either. So this was about, well we got the car in 1934. This could have been 1937.

J: How much did that car cost you? Do you remember?

L: (Laughs) Probably about \$45.00.

J: Probably.

L: It was an old Chevy. It had a standard shift on it. (J: umhm) Six cylinders.

B: No power steering in those days of course.

L: No power steering.

B: Or brakes.

L: One time I went to East Port, Maine with my mother-in-law. One axle broke down.

J: I'm not going to ask. [Laughs] I don't know anything about that.

L: One axle broke down.

B: That's 400 miles away.

L: We were in, near Haverhill. What's the name of it? Behind Haverhill, Merrimack. (J: oh ya) and there was some Syrian people there that I asked to use their phone. I got out of the car. I'd been sitting all of those hours driving. I got up to walk and I fall flat on my face.

J: Oh my God. Oh wow!

L: My mother-in-law comes out of the car, (laughing) oh my God, my God, my God!

B: Were you carrying me then Mom?

L: No.

B: No, okay.

J: You're like that anyway. [Laughs] No, [unclear].

L: So anyways, I got up, I shook myself a little bit. I said, "Gee I wonder what happened?" Maybe I stubbed my toe. I don't know what happened. So I saw this big house on a hill, it's on a curve. The car's here. So I walked around the curve, went up the stairs. I told them my situation. I called the garage, AAA, and they came over. And they towed me to this, their garage. They put in a new axle. We were on our way!

J: Oh! They had AAA in those days?

B: Yah, I was about to say that. AAA, this was like forty years ago or something like that.

L: Oh yah! I had AAA for years. I still have it.

B: I've had it myself for twenty-four years.

L: I don't have a car, but (--)

J: Um.

L: I've got it.

J: Well it comes in handy, especially in the wintertime. Okay, so now you married Mr. Pray. Did you stay in the mills? Did you stay working at the mills?

L: No, when I married Mr. Pray (J: Aha) I was getting ready to retire.

J: You, retire? I doubt it. [Laughs]

L: The mill (J: What happened?) closed down in Dracut. They call it (--)

B: J. P. Stevens.

L: Yah, J. P. Stevens.

J: Oh, is that one?

L: They moved to Henderson, is it North Carolina?

B: That was in North Carolina.

J: Oh, this was way after the war. Was this like early 50's?

B: No. This was [unclear].

L: No, 71 they closed down.

J: Oh my God. I got my date (--) Let me go back. Let me go back a little bit, because on your paper here it says you worked in the Boott Mill. When did you work (--)

L: Yes, that was the nurse.

J: Oh, that was Miss Mitchell?

L: Off and on, in and out. (J: Oh) I worked maybe a month. Six weeks, two weeks at a time. My miller called me, I'd go back.

B: Wherever they needed a hole plugged they'd call her.

J: Did they know you would be like a network of people in Lowell that they knew the good workers they would call?

L: I don't know but (--)

B: I was just, I don't know myself but I know (L: She always hired me), I know that whenever they needed a hole plugged they'd call, they'd call her. (J: Aha) Whenever they needed a hole plugged.

J: And did you do drawing-in at the Boott Mill?

L: Yes I did, and it was so different than the other mills.

J: Why?

L: Well I'll tell you. Um, on your loom, your harnesses are here. Your pattern and everything. Your threads are over there in a big big spool. (J: Umhm) You know, sometimes there's that much wool on them. But right behind the harnesses, now I'm standing behind the warp. They have these rows of drop wires, they call it. Those drop wires are on top of a thread. That thread breaks, your wire drops. It don't drop off, but it drops, the light goes on. (J: Oh) So you go looking for the broken thread, tie it up, put it back where it belongs in the wires and in the ream, and you're in business. You start up your loom, you hold up your thread so it won't fly back. You're back in business. So I did drop wire too.

J: This drawing-in. Is it done sitting down or standing up?

L: Sitting down.

J: It's done sitting down.

L: Drop wires are standing up. Batteries, everything else (J: umhm) except mending. I started learning mending too before the mill closed down. (J: umhm) Also I ran a sewing machine. With ah, you know what they have at the beach? They write the names on hats and everything? Well your control is under here.

J: What mill was that when you did that?

L: Um, Stevens in Dracut.

J: Oh, when you were in Dracut?

L: You write the numbers of the order and the style on the salvage, you know, (J: umhm) of your cloth. (J: Cloth). The cloth is already woven by then (J: umhm) and it comes to be inspected. And all the flaws that are in it are marked up. But before it's inspected, I have a ticket that tells me the number of order, order number and the style number. And I write that on the edge. (J: umhm) Next, next, next, you know. Brrr. Write your numbers you know?

J: Did you work piece work, or was that (--)

L: At first when I was on drawing-in. But after I started doing all these jobs (J: umhm) they gave me the pay I was making on drawing-in.

J: And you didn't have to (--)

L: What did I have to lose?

J: Umhm, that's right. Ah, did men do the type of work you did?

L: Drawing-in, no.

J: No, it was all women?

L: Yup! They did batteries-in,. and dropped wires, and after awhile, back in around '68 they had these machines to tie. When they'd take warp out of the room when it was finished, they leave a long, long thing of threads. Now if it was a white warp there probably was no, no (unclear), but even if there was it was only one color. They'd tie that in with this machine. So you wouldn'tt have to draw it all over again.

J: Well did you have somebody helping you do all of this or what?

L: No, you do it alone.

J: You do it all alone? And it is eight hours a day, forty hours a week?

L: And people wear glasses on that job.

J: Did they give you periodic raises? Or did you have to fight for your money?

L: I never had to fight. If other mills, you know when I worked in the, in Stevens (--) We'll say some of the woolen mills would give their people a raise, (J: Sure) we'd get a raise too.

J: Then Stevens was good to their help?

L: Oh yes.

J: I mean you never was in a strike, you never walked out on anything like that?

L: No.

J: Yah.

L: No, I'd never walk out.

J: Yup.

L: I'd stay.

J: Oh, there were some people that would walk out?

L: Oh yah, they didn't like the way things were, they'd walk.

Tape I, Side B ends
Tape II, Side A begins

J: You did have cockroaches?

L: Yah, and mice too!

J: They had mice too? Did you use to pack a lunch and take it with you or what?

L: Yes, I'd pack a lunch and take it with me.

J: All right.

L: And one time I had my dinner on the window. You know, they had these big window sills.

J: Umhm.

L: Put my bags there.

J: What mill was that?

L: The Boott

J: The Boott, okay.

L: And I found a cockroach [Laughs] in my bag. That was the end of it.

J: Oh my God!

L: I took one of those shafts from the harnesses in the drawing-in room, you know? I bent each end. One end I swung over the pipes, the steam pipes and I hung my bag. So they never got in there any more.

J: [Laughs] No it's too high up, it would swing way up there.

L: That's right!

J: Yah. What did you (--)

L: These cockroaches weren't flying ones.

J: [Laughs] Um, what did you usually pack for lunch?

L: Oh, whatever my mother had. If she had roast beef ,or roast pork, or she use to make those ah, pork scrap.

J: Yah. What do they call that in French?

L: Corton.

B: Corton.

J: Corton, I like that.

B: Delicious isn't it?

J: Yes.

L: She'd make that. I'd make a sandwich with that. (J: Okay) She use to put a lot of onion in it. (J: Oh) I love onions.

J: It's very spicy anyway, isn't it?

L: It is, yup.

J: Can you make it too?

L: No I don't.

B: You use to, didn't you?

L: I did a couple of times but, I'm alone. (J: Oh) It goes bad on me before I can eat it all, you know? (J: Yah) I know how.

J: So when Ronny was with you though, didn't you make it when he was a youngster?

L: He didn't like it?

B: I learn to like it later.

J: Yah, as we get older (--)

B: She didn't have a whole lot of time either, you got to remember Julie.

L: That's right.

B: Because she was working full time, plus she was keeping the house, you know, and everything like that. So.

L: And you know we lived in Ferry lane. Ah, when he was born, he was born on Ferry Lane. Ah, 39, where we lived? And ah, the lady next door took care of him. She had six children of her own,

J: You went back to work?

L: After he was born? Oh yah!

J: Yah. Okay.

L: Yah.

J: So did you pay her? Or did she just (--)

L: Oh no, I paid her.

J: You paid.

L: I brought his clothes, diapers and his milk, you know? At that time he was on the bottle, you know?

J: Did you breast feed at first?

L: At first.

J: At first and then?

L: But when my, discovered my husband was running around, (J: Oh) that killed everything. I lost everything.

J: Oh. yah. Yah.

L: We had to put him on the bottle.

J: You got very nervous.

L: I took him to see the doctor, you know? And the doctor said, "Well, we'll try him on whole milk."

J: Umhm.

L: And he took on to it, you know?

J: What was he? About eleven months old maybe, or?

L: Seven.

J: Oh seven months old. (L: Yah) Yah, because they use to nurse them a long time in those days.

L: My mother nursed me till I was almost two.

J: Um.

B: I don't know if you knew that girl, Susan St. James, formerly of McMillan and wife?

J: Yah.

L: She nursed her son till he was two years old.

J: Oh, that's unusual for her (--).

B: On the set.

J: For her generation.

B: On the set even (J: Yah) while she was working. She was still nursing him when he was two years old.

L: Which one of the Redgraves got fired because she was bringing her baby and nursing him?

B: Oh.

L: On the set?

J: Oh that's right, Lynn Redgrave.

B: Lynn Redgrave.

L: Lynn.

J: Yah, you're right. So everyone nursed in those days? (L: Oh yah) Yah. So then you went back to work and your neighbor (--)

L: I went back to the Uxbridge Worsted.

J: Aha. Were you living in a tenement house at that time?

L: No. We lived in a cottage, seven rooms, three down and four up.

J: Did you own it?

L: No. We paid rent.

J: How much rent? Do you know what you paid?

L: Five dollars, I remember that.

J: Five dollars a week.

B: The same thing that she use to pay the next door neighbor for minding me. She paid her a dollar a day, five days a week. (J: Oh) It was costing her as much to have me minded as it was to pay the rent on the house.

J: Imagine that. Incredible!

L: Well, we lived well. (J: Aha)

B: You're talking about a take home salary of maybe thirty, thirty-five dollars a week in those days. And ten of it was going for child care and rent.

J: How did you get to work? Did you have a ride?

L: I grab the bus.

J: Oh, the bus.

L: I'd go down Ferry Lane to W. Sixth Street, across from St. Louis' Rectory. (J: uh huh) And I'd take the bus and get off in the square, walk to Market Street, go to work.

J: And then come home and pick up your son?

L: I'd go by his house. There was the house where he was and he singing, "Mama, Mama." And I'd go and get him and I'd take him home.

J: What did you do on Sunday, when you didn't have work?

L: Oh, quite a few things. We'd walk around. When he was little he was afraid of trees. You know, I'd take him out at night in his carriage. Walk around you know, and he'd fall asleep in the carriage. I'd come home. I'd sit for awhile. Then I'd bring him in. Get him ready for bed. Put him in his crib. I'd bring the carriage up the steps.

J: All by yourself?

L: Yah! He couldn't help me. He was only a little baby.

B: You know what else she did? We spent a lot of time together when I was a kid. We'd go on a lot of trips. (L: Yup) We used to go to New York.

L: After I got a car.

B: Stay in a hotel and things like that. I was five, six years old and I was going to New York regularly.

J: She's an unusual woman.

B: I'm telling you!

L: I love to travel, you know?

B: She use to read comic books to me when I was a kid. I use to have a favorite (--)

L: Friday night.

B: I use to have a favorite thing. I'd say to her, when it was time to go to bed, I'd say, "Ma, read me, read me," cause I couldn't read yet. I was maybe three-four years old, right?

J: Right.

B: She'd buy the comic books and she'd read the comic books to me. That type of thing. She'd buy all kinds of candy and stuff like that.

L: Chips.

B: Even though she didn't have a lot of money. I was the best dressed kid in the neighborhood, and probably had more toys than any other kid in the neighborhood.

J: She's a neat woman, yah.

B: She was dedicated. Like I told you, she was dedicated and she was doing that on a pretty small salary.

J: Did you go to church on Sunday?

L: Oh yah. Yah he was going to St. Louis School.

B: See I went to the St. Louis School, which was a Catholic school. It was like two minutes a walk away.

L: So I use to go to 8:00 Mass.

J: 8:00 huh?

L: And then later on my father, my mother had died. (J: umhm) She didn't even see him.

J: Oh.

L: I was two months pregnant when she passed away. My father come home from Mass, eleven o'clock Mass. I always had something good cooking and you could smell it. Pa would come and eat with us for dinner. Remember that? (B: Yah) Yah, he'd stop by. After Mama died too, I use to darn his socks, because Ma was very dedicated too. You know how you mend? (J: umhm) I use to do that. I do that for him too.

B: She does that for me to this day, (unclear)

L: Because he's got no wife, you know? (J: umhm) And Scott has no mother. They're alone. And I can do it, so why.

B: Scott and I are a similar situation as she and I.

J: Umhm. It's been several generations now. She's taken care of all the generations.

B: That's right. As a matter of fact, our fourth generation is in school, otherwise held be here today too.

J: Right. You really are quite a lady.

L: I don't think so. I'm just doing what comes naturally.

J: I know. You give them a lot of love and they give it back to you.

T: Oh yah. We talk on the phone too. Or when I leave, I go and see them quite often, you know? I spend sometime at his house and then I take a bus home. I tell them, don't bother now, I'm going to stop at Demoulas and I'm going to buy a few things, like mild and bread. It's not heavy. (J: Um) And I get out of Demoulas and I walk that Dummer Street to the City Hall. Pawtucketville stops right there.

J: Umhm.

L: I'd buy a pass every month, because I ride the bus. I go everywhere.

B: She buys a \$15.00 monthly pass and she probably gets \$60.00 to \$70.00 worth of bus rides out of it (L: Yes) because she's constantly going. (J: right)

L: I go everywhere by bus. (J: Right, right) You know?

J: You really look like, if they still had the mills you'd be working today.

B: She would!

L: I would!

B: She would.

L: I'd still be at (--)

J: You don't wear glasses? (L: no) You don't have glasses on?

L: No, and I do a lot of mending too.

J: Imagine that! Tell me about the Steven Mill? What made you go out to Dracut? Did you leave the Boott Mill (L: No) and go out there?

L: The Merrimack, I was working third shift. They were on their way out. I worked for Mr. Taylor, and they were on their way out and I could see it. And they had a big lay-off.

J: They were going down South, is that it?

L: I don't know where they went. (J: Umhm) I couldn't tell you.

B: They might have, they might have (--)

L: It was a cotton mill.

J: It was a cotton mill?

J: What year was this now?

L: Huh?

J: What year?

L: 1955.

J: Okay.

L: Yah, 1955. And ah, my sister was laid off, and of course she did winding. And she went to sign for her check.

L: And on the board they have so many jobs open. "Drawing-in girl wanted." She calls me. I was asleep. She says, "Lee, get in your car, go to unemployment. They're looking for a drawing-in girl somewhere." So I went over there, got a card to introduce me to the boss in Dracut. I went over there and I made a hit with the old Pollock.

J: He was a Polish man then? (Hear children in background)

L: Yup. (J: Aha) He's dead now. (J: oh) And ah, I told him the jobs I did and everything, you know? (J: umhm) He says, come in Monday to work. The drawing-in girl that was out, had to have her breast removed. Yah, and she wouldn't be working for three months. This was in October. She wouldn't be back till January. So I went to work and I did different jobs there too. Dropping wires, you know? And he was glad because the woman on dropped wires was always sick. Um, the head one on dropped wires use to scare everybody away. She got the best work and everything. When I went to work with her I said, "Look Stella (J: laughs) I'm going to be working here with you. Everybody quits or dies. Me, I'll be here a long time after you're gone." And you know she died two years ago.

J: Oh gee. Did you stay friends with her after that?

L: Oh yes!

J: I mean, you told her (--)

L: Oh yah we worked together side by side.

J: Oh that's good.

L: Oh yah! But I did tell her that.

J: Yah. Well see, once she know your mother wasn't going to take any monkey business, (B: Right, that's exactly it.) you know, they measure each other up. (B: Yah, yah) Just like men.

L: I'm here to work (J: Right), and don't you try to take any work away from me.

J: Leona, um, may I call you Leona?

L: Yes you can.

J: Were there a lot of dedicated women like you? Or were some women not so dedicated?

L: They, I don't think they cared.

J: Sloppy work? Yah, they didn't care huh?

L: Oh on drawing-in you have to be dedicated.

J: Does that pay more than some of the other jobs?

L: It does. (J: Oh) Oh ya!

J: So only the best would get that job?

L: Well if you didn't know drawing-in, forget it.

J: Um. Was it hard to learn?

L: Not to me. (J: Aha) Because I, well, if I say it myself, I'm good at figures.

J: Okay. (L: You know?) And that's what it needs. Like somebody from overseas who didn't read and write, they couldn't do it, could they?

L: Well if they were in England (--)

B: Don't forget, don't forget she graduated from McIntosh and she had that offer to be the secretary (--)

J: That's what I thought about.

B: Not anyone could do drawing-in. She's too modest.

J: I'm talking about the Italian women, the Portuguese women, I'm not talking about the Irish and the English.

L: You mean they just came to this country?

J: Yah, yah.

L: It would take time.

J: Yah. See what kind of jobs did they end up getting? They must have gotten spinning? Is that what (--)

L: Spinning and winding.

J: Are those are (--). What's the difference between spinning and ring spinning? I never really knew.

L: Um, well I don't know if I can explain.

J: Did you work it? (L: Yes) Did you do that too? Oh!

L: Both, all kinds of spinning. (J: Yah) Spinning on cones. Spinning on bobbins and on spools. But ring spinning, you have a bobbin and you put it in this, on this, whatever you call, peg. (J: Peg, oh) And around where your thread goes, there's a little ring (J: umhm) on the rim and your thread goes in there. I don't know why or what it does to it, but that's the way it looks.

J: Wasn't that a boring job compared to drawing-in?

L: I'd rather do drawing-in.

J: You'd rather, yah. Well it took a little more (--)

L: It's easier too.

B: It's more of a skilled job, drawing-in.

L: [Coughs]

J: That's what I figured just from talking.

B: Yah, you're talking a little bit of skill here.

J: Aha. Were there any other jobs that you had to know how to read and write to do, in the mill?

L: I thought you had to read and write for all of them. [Laughs] I don't know.

J: Well I can tell you this. My mother was a spinner and she did not know how to read and write. She came here from overseas when she was twelve. She went and learned spinning. And I remember (--)

L: How old is your mother?

J: My mother's passed away but she would have been eighty-two.

L: Ah, like my sister's going to be eighty-two.

J: She past away two years ago. I lost her.

L: What was your maiden name?

J: Williams.

L: Williams?

J: Umhm. It's a translation. My father had a little grocery store on Hampshire Street. You remember Hampshire Street?

L: Yah. but what part of Hampshire?

J: Okay, going down (--)

L: Near Essex?

J: Yah, going down to the Pacific Mill. My mother worked in the Pacific as a spinner.

L: Oh, wait a minute now, Hampshire Street. Yah, there's Broadway, Franklin, Hampshire.

(Tape is turned off and on again)

J: Okay now. To get back to the Stevens Mill. Um, Ronny was growing up.

L: Yah, Ronny was how old?

B: In '55? Oh, no, you're talking about (--)

L: '55, you were fourteen.

B: You weren't in Stevens in '55. You went to Stevens much later. (L: '55!) You were in the Merrimack in '55.

L: Yah, but I was, I went in October of '55.

B: The Stevens?

L: Yes!

B: I don't (--) I always thought you started in Stevens like after I got married ,or something.

L: No. No, you were in (--) Remember? (B: Okay, fine) I use to come out of the second shift for awhile and I'd drive to Pease Air Force Base to pick you up. You didn't have a car then.

B: That's right, that's right.

J: Which shift did you like to work?

L: First.

J: Oh, you preferred the first. Yah, then you'd be home by what, 2:00?

L: Oh no!

L: Oh no! (J: No?) Four. Yah.

J: What were the hours?

L: See, drawing-in (J: umhm) we had a whole hour for lunch. You know, we could do what we wanted.

J: What time did you start in the morning?

L: Seven.

J: Seven, aha.

L: And we had 12:00 to 1:00, and then 1:00 to 4:00.

J: Did you go out shopping during that hour? Or did you just (--)

L: Sometimes I'd go out and pay bills. Go pay my telephone, um whatever bill I had. I'd have the car.

J: What nationality were most of your girlfriends?

L: All kinds.

L: All kinds? Who was your favorite?

L: Well, Ida, in Lawrence. Ida Raymond was her maiden name. (J: Aha) She lived like I said, on the corner of Haverhill and Railroad. (J: Umhm) But her (--)

J: Was that near May Street, Railroad?

L: The street after, going towards to hill, is May Street. Hafner's (--)

J: She didn't date a Lebanese guy, did she?

L: Huh ?

J: [Laughs] That name sounds familiar.

L: Raymond? Ida Raymond?

J: Yah, it sounds familiar to me.

B: She didn't marry a Lebanese?

L: She married an Ohlson. (J: Ohlson?) Ah, Swedish.

J: Oh well, anyway, that's neither here nor there. Now over here in Lowell, did you, you know, chum around with any of the Greek girls or?

L: Mrs. Roy. (J: Mrs. Roy) I minded her children. For a long time there she had a daughter in New Jersey. He was growing up. I'd drive her car on a Friday night. She didn't trust herself in the fog or with the lights at night, driving.

J: Aha. You always had a lot of self-confidence huh?

L: Yah. Oh yah.

B: (Speaks too low-unclear)

J: What kind of hopes did you have for your son when he was growing up?

L: Let him do what he wanted! (J: Really?) If he wants to do something, let him do it.

J: What if he wanted to go in the mill? What would you have told him?

L: I'd tell him the pros and cons. He knew what the mill was like. I took him in the mill.

B: She started ... I'd been there a few times. I already knew I didn't want it. (J: yes she ...) I had that figured out by the time I was about eight years old.

L: But you know!

J: Why?

B: The weave room. I don't know if you've ever been inside a weave room, which is where she spent a lot of time.

L: The noise.

B: But the looms. I don't know. Are they looms, or what are they Ma, the machines?

L: They're looms, looms.

B: They're ranked side by side. There's one weave room that she took me into, I forget which company it was, (L: um) but (--)

L: The Uxbridge Worsted?

B: How many, how many looms were in that room would you say Ma?

L: Oh my Lord!

B: It had banks and rows of them.

L: About sixty?

B: And it was so noisy, it was unbelievable! My mother had a pretty bad hearing impediment.

L: Yes.

B: I don't know if you noticed she talks pretty loud?

J: A little bit.

B: Okay, it's because she doesn't hear so well, because of all the years she spent in the weave room with the looms (makes sounds like the looms running). Loud, loud, loud and dozens of them. Row upon row (L: Yah), and they were all making a lot of noise. So you had to scream to be heard.

J: Would you say that was the worse part of working in the mill?

L: No, it wasn't, hey.

B: Well, are you asking me?

L: Nothing was bad.

B: I didn't, you know, I didn't go to the mill (L: really!) all that often with my mother, but the thing that stands out in my mind was that weave room with those noisy machines. Like I said, I was a small kid and I was pretty well overwhelmed by the whole thing. You know? And like I said, at a very young age I had (--) As it turned out, I wound up working in some factories as a teenager at General Electric after the Air Force, before I got into sales, but only because I didn't have any training in something else that I worked in factories, really, because I had seen my mother do it. In fact, I remember (--) I'll tell you the truth. We were living on Lakeview Avenue, which is right near Bridge Street, which is heading into downtown Lowell, okay. And there's a bridge right there, the Central Bridge, it's called. We call it the Bridge Street Bridge. And right next to it is the Boott Mills, okay. And I'd be walking to Lowell High in the morning, okay. It was right across the river from where I was. And the steam would be coming out of the Boott Mill, okay, and the steam would be floating over the bridge. And it was so cold that the steam would form tiny little snowflakes that would fall over me. And every time I'd walk across that bridge and saw those snowflakes falling on me, I'd think of my mother in those wretched mills. Okay. (J: He did think of you) My mother's got the positive attitude, okay, (L: Hey!) but you know, I've been in those mills and I've done some jobs other than textile work in the old mills. They became shoe shops and things like that. I've worked in them and I've seen them. I saw them from little child and I had it clear in my head, when I was young, that, that wasn't the place for me. As I said, I wound up doing some work in them, but no longer than I had to. Once I learned that I could talk people into buying things, that was it for me in the mills (J: umhm) pretty much, you know?

L: It could have been worse.

B: Because she, I saw her (L: You know?) when she came home from work, how dragged out she was.

L: Yah, well.

J: She never admits it during this interview.

B: No, no.

J: But you must have gotten pretty tired?

B: She was exhausted.

L: Oh, I don't know.

J: Why didn't you go into some kind of sales work? I mean women did do, you know, sales clerking.

B: She, she did do it once that I know of.

L: Oh yah, a long time ago.

B: With Stanley Home Parties. She use to be a Stanley (--)

L: Yah, Stanley Home Products. (J: Yah.) But you know people order things and they don't want to take the order, and you had to pay for it.

B: Can I tell you something Julie? You know what it is with my mother? Why she didn't get something more suited to her? (J: umhm) Because I believe as a child she was ingrained in the American work ethic. You know, roll up your sleeves and do it! Okay. And from a ground level, blood and guts type of thing. And she never really thought of herself as having the ability, or the talent to do something better. Which she obviously had and still has (J: I agree), okay. She spent approximately forty-nine years off and on in the mills, when she could have been, like I said, a federal secretary in Washington. And who knows what else she could have done. My father himself admits it after all these years. They've been separated now for over forty years. My father told me no more than three years ago, "Ron, he says, your mother is such a good business woman, she is so sharp that if she and I had stayed together we could be millionaires now."

J: He admits it.

B: My father has owned businesses for the last forty years. He's owned taxi businesses, gasoline stations, all kinds of different things. And he said, if I had stayed with your mother we'd be millionaires now.

J: Have you reconciled? Do you see your father often now?

B: I've made a very strong attempt over a period of many years to reconcile with my father. And things were going along real well until one time. A couple of years ago I had the misfortune of repeating to my mother what my father's sister had told her son. Now, let me get this in

prospective. My father's sister was Rose. Her son is Carl. Carl told me after Rose told him that my father was dating another woman, and he was married to another woman at the time. And he was running around with another women. So I happen to mention it to my mother. Where upon my mother mentioned it to my father's sister-in-law up in New Hampshire, (J: umhm) who gave it to my father both barrels. Where upon my father had it in for me after that, because I had told my mother that.

J: You never thought it would end up there.

B: No, of course not. (J: No) Of course not. But since (--)

L: You'd think held pick on me, but I got too sharp a mouth.

B: Yah, see, she's (--) My father doesn't want to tangle with my mother. She'll cut him to pieces with her tongue. (L: You know, because I was) Okay.

J: Aha, aha.

B: But ah, I guess I've been [unclear] with my Dad for about two years now because of the unfortunate remark that I told her, I told my mother that, you know, he had this other woman while he was married to another woman. You know?

J: You know in essence your mother has been a victim of her time. (B: Yup) Because if it was now she would have gone to Washington. (B: Of course, of course) She would have probably gone to college anyway, (B: Certainly, certainly) you know, because she's so sharp.

B: You know something? She'll be eighty in March and that woman can still remember probably a thousand birthdays.

L: Oh yah!

B: Of people she knows.

J: That's why she was so good in the mills too.

B: She's very very sharp.

J: Yah. You were a person they didn't really have to prompt to do your work. You know, your the one that (--)

L: No. If it's got to be done, I'll do it.

B: If anything, it was the other way around. She'd be going after the foreman and saying, "Hey I'm out of work."

J: Is that what you had to do when (--)

L: Oh yah! (J: Yah!) I'd say, "Hey what's next?"

J: Were most of those formen and superintendents good to the girls, or were they mean?

L: Well I don't know. They were (--) I thought they were nice to me, especially the last one there. (J: Yes) In the (--)

J: You never had a problem with them?

L: No. Stevens Mill. (J: Yah) He'd meet me in the hall in the morning and he'd let me know what I was going to do that day. This was drawing-in. (J: Okay) This was on the sewing machines. (J: Okay) Um, this was on the batteries.

J: You're showing me with your hands what they would do to you.

L: Yah, what I was going to do.

J: What you were going to do.

L: And I'd go and take my coat off or whatever, and I say "Well, which weave room do you want me to go in? Downstairs or upstairs, or where?" And held tell me. Downstairs we had big, big looms. We use to make the cloth for billiard tables.

J: Oh, the green felt?

B: Yes.

L: Yes.

J: At the Stevens?

L: Very thick. (J: Aha) Oh about twenty four harnesses deep.

J: That's one place you never worked would be dye house. [Laughs] (L: No) They didn't put women in dyehouses.

L: No, just men.

J: Just men in that.

T: I don't know anything about the dye house. (J: Yah) I've never been there.

J: My uncle worked there, that's why I remember the name. Cause he use to come home so dirty. I remember he had these long boots.

B: That's like me on the [unclear] in G.E. I used to work with all kinds of (J: um) chemicals, and dyes, and everything like that. And all that stuff would come back at my face and go up my nose. Sunday morning I'd be in church after having gotten out of work, I was on the third shift at the time. I'd get out of work at 8:00 on Saturday morning, and by the time I was in church on Sunday I'd had at least two showers. Three, because I had shower time on the job. They use to give you twenty minutes to take a shower.

J: Sure, you were so dirty.

B: That's how dirty you got, you know? So I'd had three showers by Sunday morning. I'd go to church and I'd blow my nose, and whatever color dye I had been working on the day before, (J: You had it, oh (unclear) oh!) (L: Yah) I'd blow blue, red, black, you name it. (J: Oh my gosh) That's how filthy it was. I was getting \$4.50 an hour in 1966, in a factory. That equates out to about ah, probably \$30,000 a year now, as a factory worker. Okay. There was only five guys in there that were doing that job. That was the highest paid production job in the plant. (J: Yah, but you paid) But it was physically demanding. We got, the minimum wage at the time I think was a \$1.75 an hour, and the average guy in General Electric in those days was making probably about \$2.75 to \$3.00. And four guys and myself, five of us, were making about \$4.50. But believe me when they paid you \$4.50 an hour in a factory in those days, you earned it. (J: umhm) It was piece work. It was heavy work, it was dirty work, it was sweaty work and it was responsible besides, because I had a crew that I was responsible for. I was running the machine, but these other guys were helping me. And if they were laying down nothing got done. So I had to, you know, that type of thing. (J: right) And like I said, you've got filth, the sweat, the colors and the dyes and everything. There was the (--) Not the type of thing I would recommend to anyone, least of all my mother.

L: You know what I use to do? At noon, when I was on drawing-in, you had an hour for lunch. And there was this poor old Armenian. I swear he was ninety if he was a day. And he had a hard time working. He shouldn't have been working. And he was a weaver. Weaving is a hard job, you know. And he'd eat on the fly. So I'd go over. And I forget his first name now. I'd call him by his name and I'd say, "Look, you sit down, you eat. I'll take care of your looms." Most of the time I was his battery hand when I was on batteries, because people would stay out of work. There was a whole blank wall, no windows and it was hot in there. He was in the corner. Poor old man. I'd go over there and I'd take care of his looms and he use to go like this. He was so glad. Held eat his dinner.

B: Wasn't his name Abraham?

L: Abraham yah. What was their last name? Ah, Elizabeth.

B: Oh my God.

L: His wife was Elizabeth.

J: Well did you see them socially? Even though (--) I mean when they worked in the mill with you, did you get to see them outside of the mills?

L: Yah. for awhile. I used to know Elizabeth. (J: Aha) I use to go to her house.

J: Use to go to her house?

L: She lives on Methuen Street. (J: Uh huh) But the old man's dead now.

B: But as far as the social aspect of my mother's life is concerned, most of the mill workers she really didn't spend time with.

J: That's what I meant.

L: No, it was with my family mostly.

B: Her private time was spent with her old friends from Lawrence, (J: oh) new friends from Lowell, her family. But to tell you the truth she didn't have a whole lot in common with the other mill workers. She's too damn bright.

J: I understand.

L: Well! [Unclear]

B: Really! She wouldn't tell you that, but I'll tell you. She was too bright. She couldn't communicate with these people. (J: It was frustrating) They couldn't communicate with her.

J: That's right. That's why I kept asking her about the immigrant groups, because I know they didn't know how to read and write.

B: No, I don't even mean the immigrant groups. I'm talking about the established, French, Irish, Italian people.

J: You mean, born here?

D: Yah, yah. They were established. They weren't immigrants or anything like that. But my mother, like I said, is such a sharp person compared to other factory workers, that she didn't have a whole lot in common with them.

J: Well did she meet, did you meet a lot of people through church? You went to Sunday, to mass on Sundays. Did you do anything in church? Do you remember?

L: Well I knew some people that went there, you know, through the years. And like when we moved on Ferry Lane, (J: umhm) most of the time I used to go to St. Michael's. Now I knew a fellow there, he's probably about sixty-five, sixty-four. I just found out three years ago what his name was. He was an usher and he'd go around with a collection plate. (J: Aha) Edward Gillis. He lives on Eleventh Street. You know how I saw him on the bus. He works at the, oh what's that place on Westford Street where they bring all the garbage?

B: The land fill?

L: And they burn it?

B: The dump. Oh, the incinerator you're talking about, Lowell Incinerator.

L: Yup. He works at the incinerator. And he was on the bus. And we recognized each other after all these years. And I've been living here ten years.

J: Aha. He used to collect in church?

L: Yah. He looks at me, he says, "How are you doing?" He say, "You're still around?" I said, "Yes." "You too?" Of course I'm much older than he is, you know. At least fifteen years older than he is.

B: That's another thing about Mama that I'd like to tell.

J: Yes?

L: Huh?

B: Ah, both of her husbands have been significantly younger than her.

L: Yeh.

J: Oh your first husband too?

L: My second husband was eleven years younger,

B: And her first husband was (--)

L: That's him up there in the picture.

J: I'm gonna go take a look when this finishes.

B: Her first husband, my father, is five and a half years younger than she is.

L: Yup. No, five years and one month.

B: Five years and one month.

L: March to April. He's in April.

B: She, she's got no use for the old dude.

J: [Laughs]

B: She like the young guys. [Laughs]

J: That's beause she was young herself. I mean chronologically it doesn't matter, not if you're young.

L: Young as I.

B: She, she can't, she can't handle being around people who act old.

J: Oh. Good lady.

B: Older people that act their age, (J: Right) she doesn't go for it.

L: There's one who lives here, she was just by awhile ago, she's practically stone deaf so bad that she comes here and the young man across the hall (J: umhm) came over one day and rapped at my door. And he's looking in and he says, "Are you all right Mrs. Pray?" I said, "Yah, this lady here lives around in the other house. She's hard of hearing." I had to yell at her. And even then, I have to make signs, you know?

B: Do you remember this? I'm sorry.

L: A long time ago, you know, before. I guess she reads my lips and she watches my hands.

Interview ends